

## Sandhill Habitat Restoration Project at Boulware Springs Nature Park and Sweetwater Preserve



### **Sandhill Habitat Restoration at Boulware Springs Nature Park and Sweetwater Preserve Project History and Details:**

The City of Gainesville is beginning the first phase of habitat restoration at Boulware Springs Nature Park, in conjunction with Alachua County's Sweetwater Preserve and adjacent private lands. This phase requires the physical removal (harvest) of invading hardwood trees in order to begin to restore approximately 80-acres of sandhill habitat on Boulware Springs and an additional 20 acres of sandhill on Sweetwater Preserve to its former health. Soon the public will notice a contractor harvesting hardwood trees. This will dramatically open up the landscape - the exact result needed for this project! The public should be aware that the landscape will look different, especially at first, but over time a beautiful transformation will take place.

Historically, the restoration project and surrounding areas were covered by habitat called sandhill - extensive expanses of grasses and showy flowers beneath widely spaced longleaf pine trees. There were some rich hammocks (hardwood forests), but it was savannas, not closed-canopy forests, that dominated our landscape. The biological diversity in this ecosystem — the highest in North America — was in the understory where flowers, gopher tortoises and fox squirrels once abounded. Over the past half-century, we have suppressed the natural fires that would periodically burn and regenerate the forest and enrich the soils. These fires would also have controlled the young non-fire tolerant oaks, such as the laurel and water oaks that are a primary target of this restoration. Longleaf pines are light-demanding — they don't survive the shade of laurel oaks and other invasive hardwood trees. Likewise for the hundreds of species of savanna grasses, wildflowers and wildlife that die out when fires are suppressed and hardwoods invade.

The goal is to bring back the former habitat and restore biodiversity to the site. It won't look like much at first, but in time the public will witness the re-emergence of a widely-spaced longleaf pine canopy with a beautiful understory of native sandhill grasses and flowers, home to native creatures such as the gopher tortoise. Once the initial tree removal is complete the East Trail at Sweetwater Preserve will be reopened. Eventually, the plan is to have walking trails and signage on Boulware Springs so that everyone can learn about and appreciate this habitat and its connection to our history.

The restoration will take place at Boulware Springs Nature Park, which is located between the Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail and Southeast 15th Street, from approximately Southeast 32nd Avenue to approximately Southeast 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and on the east side of Sweetwater Preserve across the Gainesville Hawthorn Trail from the restoration area at Boulware Springs.

For project updates, please visit our websites at [www.CityofGainesvilleParks.org](http://www.CityofGainesvilleParks.org), [www.alachuacountyforever.us](http://www.alachuacountyforever.us) or follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/GainesvillePRCA](http://www.facebook.com/GainesvillePRCA)) and Twitter ([www.twitter.com/GainesvillePRCA](http://www.twitter.com/GainesvillePRCA)).